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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 006222

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: TERROR REVISITS ASSAM PRIOR TO INDEPENDENCE DAY

REF: A. NEW DELHI 6032

[B](#). CALCUTTA 246

[C](#). CALCUTTA 215

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Indian CT experts believe the recent spate of terrorist bombings in Assam by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is "absolutely routine" and part of an annual uptick prior to India's August 15 Independence Day. The intended lethality of some recent attacks is markedly higher than usual, and may represent either attacks by different groups or a significant change in ULFA's tactics. Other groups in the region are also adding their own attacks to the mix, which will increase the casualties and mayhem over the next week. However, Indian observers predict the violence will abate after August 15, without impacting the GOI's policies to any significant degree. End Summary.

Independence Day Terror Upsurge in Assam

[1](#)2. (C) India's August 15 Independence Day is a focal point for terrorist attacks, and the United Liberation Front of Assam (Ref B), which we added this year to the Other Select Terrorist Organizations list (Ref C), is no exception. In the week before Independence Day 2004, five separate bomb attacks in Assam credited to ULFA left almost 20 dead and as many injured. This year, there have been over 15 terrorist "incidents" since August 6, including several that police averted. Our CT contacts do not expect the tempo to let up until after August 15. Assam Police Special Branch Chief Khagen Sharma told Consulate Calcutta the bombings were numerous but not "major," due to the low number of casualties.

ULFA Conducting Business as Usual

[1](#)3. (C) Assam police blame the majority of recent attacks on ULFA. The infrastructure targets -- a gas pipeline, two bridges, and at least four electrical power installations -- are typical for the group. The bridges, according to a senior Assam police officer, were "vital" for moving Army units in the state.

[1](#)4. (C) New Delhi-based terrorism expert Ajai Sahni called the current state of play in India's Northeast "absolutely routine." ULFA particularly seeks popular attention this time each year, he told us, and terrorists in India broadly seem to consider strings of attacks to be "good tactics" in getting the GOI to the bargaining table or in gaining leverage while at the table. "Until a peace deal is inked or their capabilities are compromised, there will be no radical change in their activities," Sahni added, although there is no indication that this round of terrorism will advance any of the groups' underlying separatist agendas or pressure the GOI politically.

Lethal Attacks May Not be ULFA

[1](#)5. (C) ULFA does not often claim credit for its attacks, but it did specifically deny carrying out a marketplace bombing that injured four people, the only recent attack that caused casualties. Noting ULFA's focus on infrastructure targets, Sahni told us ULFA has killed civilians before and is not averse to doing so again. However, the Assam Police Deputy Inspector General (Security) pointed out that ULFA lost prized popular support when it killed civilians in the past, and explained the ULFA terrorists want "publicity and mileage without losing popularity." The Assam DIG speculated that a "Muslim hand," (Ref A) and not/not ULFA, was behind the marketplace attack, although one of Consulate/Calcutta's CT contacts claimed Leftist terrorists have been joining ULFA recently and may have influenced the group to move away from their usual modus operandi. Also, Assam Special Branch Chief Sharma said a bomb police defused on August 9 would have caused mass casualties if it had detonated, a development inconsistent with ULFA's targeting practices, he commented.

[1](#)6. (C) The upsurge in ULFA attacks in the run-up to Independence Day may spur on other terrorist groups. In what appears to be an entirely non-ULFA incident, the comparatively smaller Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front -- which advocates a homeland for ethnic

Karbis -- shot and killed a truck driver in a barrage of gunfire on August 8 in Assam. Other Northeast terrorist groups, including the All Tripura Tiger Force, have announced they will also commit pre-Independence Day attacks.

Independence Day Boycott "Shall be Observed"

17. (U) Four terrorist groups -- ULFA, the Manipur People's Liberation Front (both banned under India's 2004 Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), the Kamatapur Liberation Organization, and the Tripura People's Democratic Front -- on August 10 announced that a general strike "shall be observed" on August 15 in the states of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura, to protest "India's colonial occupation" of these states. These strikes are usually enforced through violence. (Comment: It is generally known that there are close ideological and supply linkages among many Northeast terrorists groups, and this joint action is not novel. End Comment.)

Comment: It Will be a Long Week

18. (C) Like bad weather, our Indian contacts seem to regard terrorism in the Northeast as something that can neither be avoided nor mitigated, and is of no practical consequence to those who live outside the affected area. It is the generally viewed as being of tertiary importance after Jihadi and Naxalite terrorism, causing less pain and destruction (further away from Delhi) than either, therefore easier to endure and ignore. Assam's capital, Guwahati, is about as physically far from Delhi as is Dushanbe.
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